

BIRD WATCHING

When the Daily Telegraph described Northumberland as "a birder's paradise", they weren't exaggerating. Spot puffins and a myriad of other seabirds on a boat trip, or treat yourself to a day out with a professional birdwatching guide.

The Farne Islands are home to one of the most significant breeding seabird colonies in the UK during the summer months. Enjoy unrivalled views of the 200,000 seabirds of 23 different species, including approximately 43,000 pairs of puffins, that journey every year to raise their chicks. Various trips can be arranged by visiting the boat booking offices, situated on the Harbour in Seahouses. Trips vary from a 2-hour sail around to a full day landing.

Guided birdwatching walks can be arranged with Birdwatch North East.

Nature Reserves

Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve: Holy Island: this is a must for anyone visiting Northumberland. (TIDES must be CHECKED). Internationally important numbers of Pale-bellied Brent Geese winter here. Geese and sometimes Whooper Swans might be found in the fields at the landward end of the causeway. As one arrives on the causeway a variety of waders can be seen left and right, especially as one leaves the island as the tides flows in (a sight in itself). Once on the island a circular walk can be taken. Starting at the church inspect St Cuthbert's Island (S.W. corner of Holy Island), continue to the 'Heugh', which overlooks the channel between the island and the peninsula of mainland at Guile Point – wintering Grebes, Divers and duck can be found here. Continue to the harbour, checking for waders on the shore. Aim to visit Holy Island Lough which is a small loch with a hide, near the north-eastern corner of the island. which provides a welcome stopping point when exploring this bird-rich island. Along the two tracks (the Straight Lonnen and the Crooked Lonnen), which enable a circular walk, migrant passerines and vagrants can be found – look carefully in the hawthorn bushes for these. Short-eared Owls frequent this area and Merlin and Peregrine can often be seen.

Budle Bay: (part of above LNNR & Ramsar site) highly recommended and is viewed from wide verge near interpretation board – a spectacular place (mini Wash) for any coastal or sea bird, plus rarities. A variety of waders, gulls and duck (in the channels) when the tide is out. Geese roost here at dusk. Make best use the height advantage by viewing from the white railings at the roadside rather than descending to the shore line where you risk disturbing the birds on the mudflats and nearby channels.

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Seahouses Harbour: Always very close views of Eider. Sometimes Goldeneye, Glaucous Gull and more.

Beadnell Harbour: this shelter attracts Eider, Goldeneye and sometimes Divers.

Newton-by-the-Sea: Hide and Scrape; the hide is a National Trust one and looks over freshwater pond; the hide has a ramp for disabled access. It is located behind the dunes at the southern end of Newton Haven. At the junction of the B1339 and the B1340 (1.25m] north of Embleton, take the minor road east to Newton-by-the-Sea, passing through High Newton to Low Newton where a car park is located at the top of a rise. A path leads behind the 'square' to a scrape and the small reserve.

Soon on the right you will see the scrape that was the idea of a local birder. This has become a very important site with a wide variety of waders, including breeding Avocets.

The hide site has surrounding shrubs which are good for warblers in spring and in autumn the water with ducks, geese, waders at the pond; listen for Water Rail too. The reed beds have been the site of breeding Marsh Harriers

Hauxley Nature Reserve a Northumberland Wildlife Trust Reserve, just south of Amble is a large reserve with several hides bordering onto the coast.

Druridge Bay and **Cresswell Pond** are Northumberland Wildlife Reserves, with hides, offering good birding; further away.

The guides above are taken from North Northumberland Bird Club and written by member Steve Newman (SN), who is a professional writer and photographer and lives locally in Belford.